

The Men Who Help LBJ

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Make Vietnam Policy

McNamara Quantifies

ANY MAN RESPONSIBLE for providing physical security to the United States in an age of unparalleled insecurity must be expected to cast a larger-than-life shadow. And Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara does, but his is a double image.

One Robert McNamara lives in the fiscal year, thinks cost-effectively and allocates, for war or peace, rifles, bombs, men, ships, planes and missiles. He emits, in reassuring staccato bursts, statistics, analyses, predictions and conclusions.

The other Robert McNamara is a humanist in an imprecise world who is especially tormented by the refusal of a second-class war in a fourth-rate country to yield any specific result that can be measured in terms of a specific investment by the world's greatest military power.

This McNamara proclaims as "a kind of reductio ad absurdum" the "concept that military hardware is the exclusive or even the primary ingredient of permanent peace in the mid-20th century."

To his more polite critics, McNamara is "Janus-faced," meaning that on the war in Vietnam he talks dove-talk to the doubters and hawk-talk to the committed.

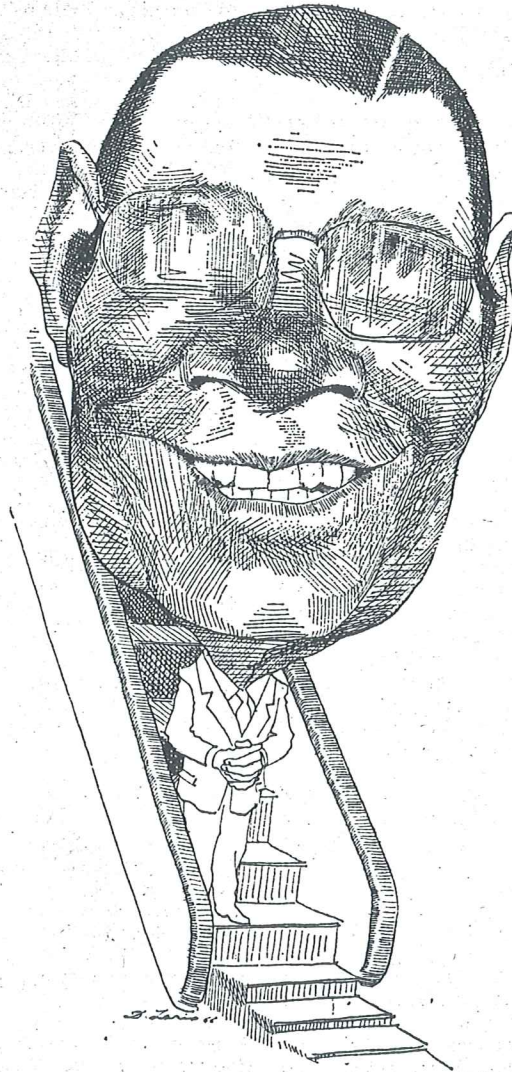
Where McNamara's talk and actions count most, inside the closed councils of Government, it is said by insiders that he is about as militant as Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Presidential Adviser Walt W. Rostow, the other principal war coordinators for the President.

A Basic Difference

THERE IS AT LEAST one fundamental difference in the views of these officials about the war, but it cannot be described by the maddeningly imprecise hawk or dove labeling.

McNamara's reputation for brilliance rests on the articulation of precision; the application of mathematical logic to break a problem into its parts; the production of a solution for each part, with a total, predictable result.

When the United States began to plunge deep into the Vietnamese war, McNamara was a prime optimist. But unforeseen difficulties kept breaking through the surface to drown his expectations: the Buddhists, the collapse or overthrow of this or that Saigon leader, the failure of various strategic



Drawings by David Levine

'... changed to a mechanical pessimist'

calculations to produce decisive results.

"He changed from a mechanical optimist to a mechanical pessimist," one who knows him intimately said.

Rusk and Rostow were and are sustained by a simpler rationale: American power and ingenuity, and the tide of history, somehow inevitably will produce success.

There are no Georgetown circuit stories of expressions of self-doubt by Rusk or Rostow in moments of candor. But there are stories about McNamara. His view is known to be that the prime decision about Vietnam was to put American military forces there and that he is as responsible for the decision to go into Vietnam as he was for the decision to enter what turned out to be the Bay of Pigs debacle. That does not mean that he was equating the two, but that he feels a deep share of the responsibility for the Vietnam war.

But it should be stressed that McNamara dismisses as total rubbish rumors that he may resign, that he is dismayed by his job, that he is now out of the inner decision-making circle or that he is thinking of anything but his job.

Bombing Pause

MCNAMARA WAS a leading advocate, after initial doubts, of what became the 37-day bombing pause in December, 1965-January, 1966. Rusk had to be converted at the last minute. Rostow was then in the State Department with little, if any, influence on any phase of foreign policy.

The sporadic McNamara emphasis on negotiations has not been the result of any lessening of confidence in American military prowess. It has come from uneasiness about his inability, and that of other top officials, to project where and how the tunnel of war would end.

"Our immediate objective," McNamara told Congress in January, "is to influence the North Vietnamese to move the conflict from the battlefield to the conference table, or to compel them to desist in their aggression."

That is the declared objective of the

entire Administration. But many officials, and former Saigon Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge has been the most outspoken of them, never have held much hope for a negotiated conclusion.

The recent case of the bombing of the Mig airfields in North Vietnam added to the public view of McNamara as more dove than hawk.

A day after a press association report that the United States was about to order the bombing of Mig bases, McNamara told a Senate subcommittee that such reports were "absolutely wrong" and "a form of incorrect and irresponsible press coverage that occasionally plagues us . . ."

The first bombing of the Mig airfields occurred exactly a month later.

McNamara, it now turns out, had challenged the bombings on what might be described as a cost-effectiveness basis. He was not opposing, as he has never opposed, bombing the North per se.

He argued within the Administration

that with the massive antiaircraft and surface-to-air missile (SAM) defenses around the Mig fields, such raids were not worth the expected cost in pilots and planes. McNamara took the same position months earlier in opposing some of the raids on SAM sites in North Vietnam.

Despite accusations that McNamara is a cold, computerized man, he has deep feelings and agonizes over the loss of pilots. The exact losses in the raids on the Mig fields and SAM sites are still labeled "secret" but there is strong evidence that the McNamara slide rule predicted heavy casualties.

The President gave the green light for the raids under strong pressure from the military and heavy backing from both Rusk and Rostow. Rusk contends that he has never proposed a bombing target, but clearly he felt that these and other air raids were part of

what he believes is the necessary pressure on the North.

McNamara, on the other hand, often argues more determinedly than Rusk and Rostow that the only place the war can be won is in the South. His associates dismiss implications that he is a recurring loser on decisions, saying there may be two dozen a day and he wins his share. Rusk and Rostow, they note, also lose some and win some.

In their own departments, McNamara and Rusk must deal with differently oriented bureaucracies: at Defense, McNamara holds down extreme hawks; at State, Rusk sits on extreme doves.

But while the McNamara and Rusk images are over-polarized by their supporters and antagonists, a basic degree of difference in their state of comfort with the present course of the war emerges.

Rostow Organizes

ON A RECENT VISIT to Walt Whitman Rostow's office in the White House basement after a wearying round on Capitol Hill, Secretary of State Dean Rusk told Rostow with a grin, "You sure live in a privileged sanctuary."

As a presidential assistant, Rostow escapes the congressional cross fire and the bureaucratic and ceremonial burdens of a departmental chief. But his boss, the President, can be as demanding as any combination of masters in Washington.

Rostow has no sanctuary from his inner-Administration critics. They are vociferous enough, but never on the public record; his proximity to the seat of power bars that, for his influence with the President has grown faster and greater in the conduct of foreign policy than that of any other non-Cabinet officer.

Within a year, Rostow has been catapulted from the chief policy planning post at the State Department into the inner-inner circle of White House decision-making. At State, Rostow's difficulties in getting past Rusk's outer office more accurately reflected Rostow's amount of influence than did his title. It was not Vietnam that caused Rostow's problem at State; it was his prolix, professional manner.

Accumulated Antagonists

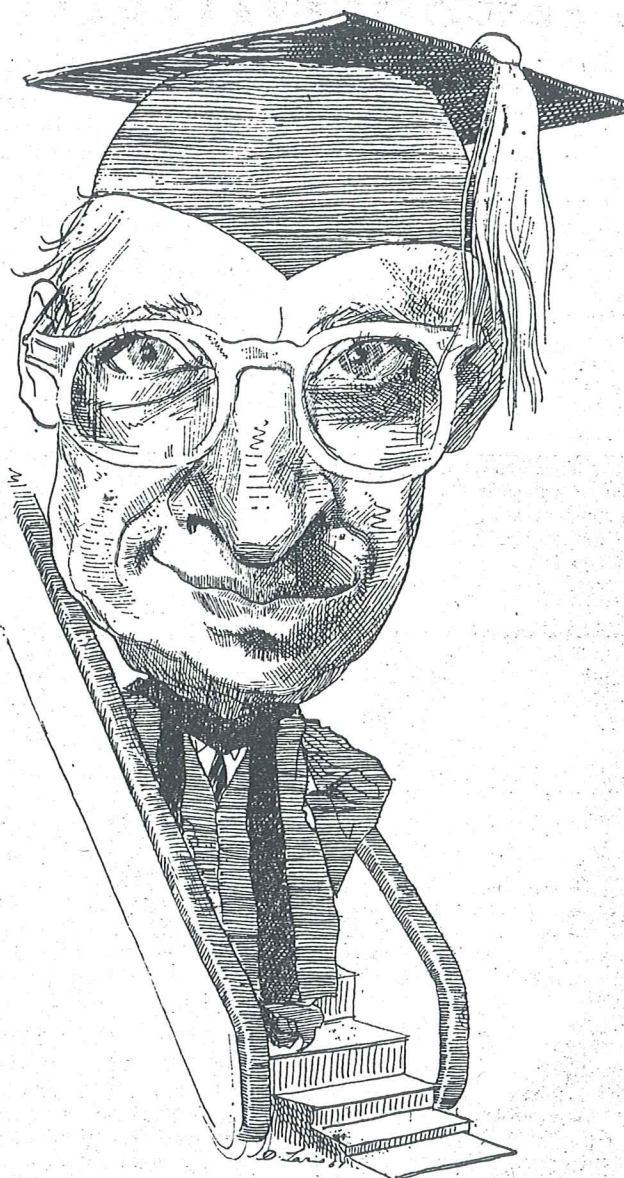
ROSTOW HAS NOT been short of opponents in Government since the outset of the Kennedy Administration, when he became the most dogged advocate for a militant stand in Vietnam.

He accumulated antagonists for his verbosity and for his soaring professorial formulations on international economics and grand diplomatic strategy. His wordage, oral and written, has been drastically foreshortened to fit Johnsonian impatience.

If he wished to do so, Rostow could now boast of having the highest-placed critics in the Administration. But he has the most vital champion, the President, to cancel them out.

More than one upper-echelon Administration critic calls Rostow an advocate of a self-justifying policy, and therefore a dangerous man. Critics contend that Rostow fails to do what they say McGeorge Bundy did when he ran the White House foreign policy shop: serve up all the options, however distasteful, in cold and clear logic.

Rostow scoffs at these contentions as totally untrue and naive. He says: "Any kind of angling would be immediately detected by the President and the Secretaries (Rusk and McNamara). My



'... a faithful two-way communicator'

job is to be a faithful two-way communicator with the enormous privilege of presenting my views when asked

for them. If I ever tried to use this job as a lobby, I'd be dead."

There are signs that there is considerably less than a state of rapport between McNamara and Rostow, although neither is likely to acknowledge that.

Rusk, in agreeing to Rostow's transfer to the White House, reportedly included a personal deal between the two men. According to one account, Rostow agreed to forward to the President no paper involving the

State Department's interests without Rusk's prior knowledge. Rusk had difficulty with Bundy in that regard on at least one occasion and he was determined when Bundy left to head the Ford Foundation that it would not occur again.

Rostow has been described as an "economic historian turned social philosopher" by historian and former White House aide Arthur Schlesinger

Jr. Rostow also has been dubbed "Chester Bowles with machineguns."

In the first days of the Kennedy Administration, Rostow was at the White House as Bundy's top aide, concentrating on Vietnam and Laos. Years before North Vietnamese regular troops set foot in the South, Rostow contended that the war was "an operation run from Hanoi against South Vietnam," and therefore clear aggression.

Rostow joined Gen. Maxwell Taylor, after they visited South Vietnam in 1961, in recommending that an American military task force of perhaps 10,000 men be sent for possible defensive combat operations and, if the South Vietnamese were hard pressed, to act as an emergency reserve. Early in 1962, President Kennedy decided to expand the American commitment from 700 to 11,000 "advisers"—the first fateful dispatch of large numbers of men.

Also at that time, Rostow argued for a contingency plan of retaliation against the North, graduated to match the intensity of Hanoi's support of the Vietcong. It was not until early 1965, however, that President Johnson agreed to that line of reasoning and began the systematic bombing of North Vietnam.

Many Rostow critics contend that he is bedazzled by air power because of his service after World War II in the American survey of air damage to Nazi Germany. Today he pores over photos and charts of petroleum dumps, industrial plants and other targets in North Vietnam.

In his 1960 book, "The United States in the World Arena," Rostow lauded the generals and civilians who pulled strings to get big air strikes against Hitler's Germany and were willing "to take lonely, risky decisions in the face of organized bureaucracy and to live by the Chinese proverb on the desk of the Eighth Air Force's commander: 'There are some orders of the Emperor which must be disobeyed.'"

Needless to say, there is no evidence that Rostow today is disobeying any presidential orders. He is, as he says, a two-way communicator. Mr. Johnson fires back many of his memos with "see me" scrawled in the margin and often telephones Rostow from the Texas ranch to transmit orders to

others in Government.

Eternal Optimist

ROSTOW ALWAYS HAS been an optimist about Vietnam, sharing the long historical view with Rusk rather than the frustrations with McNamara. But many Administration figures say a major reason for Rostow's White House success is his role as a creator of what amounts to an improvised Johnsonian Grand Design.

It is argued that all Presidents like to think of their every act, however seized upon in a moment of crisis, as part of a consistent, logical and intellectual pattern. Rostow has a way of bestowing on each Johnsonian act a pattern of high-policy forethought. The President's last State of the Union theme, that "we are in the midst of a great transition" in world affairs, in which the stand in Vietnam inescapably falls into place as a key move in a world of change, was a Rostovian phrase and design.

Rostow is at one with Rusk in seeing Vietnam as a critical American effort to demolish the Communist tactic of "wars of national liberation." He views the leaders in Hanoi as old, implacable men who have spent a lifetime in a dream world, believing they would inherit France's longtime colony of Indochina. Obviously, they must be disabused of that dream, and he believes that only force will do it.

At Tuesday Lunch,

A FEW MINUTES before 1 p.m., Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and Presidential Assistant Walt W. Rostow assemble in the second-floor sitting room of the White House, just off the President's Dining Room.

Over a glass of sherry or a dietetic root beer, they compare notes. In a moment or two, President Johnson, who favors the diet drink, arrives, accompanied by his press secretary, George Christian.

For a while, there is conversation. Mr. Johnson recounts an emotional Medal of Honor ceremony from which he has just come. Or perhaps he talks of politics. It is he who signals the switch to affairs of state. It is he who moves the group from the living quarters into the dining room.

The walls of the dining room are covered with brilliantly-colored scenes from the American Revolution, one of them a stylized portrayal of Cornwallis surrendering his sword at Yorktown. It is a painfully contrasting reminder of simpler days to the intimate group of war planners who gather weekly to grapple with the most baffling conflict in American history, the war in Vietnam.

A Movable Feast

THE FORUM is known as The Tuesday Lunch. The title is more symbolic than precise. The group usually lunches on Tuesdays but sometimes on other days. Often these same men gather at other times of day or at other places. Occasionally others join them at lunch.

At the table, Lyndon Johnson dips into the minds of the men around him in smorgasbord fashion. He draws from each his arguments and recommendations and sometimes there are presidential decisions on the spot.

But other times, the decisions come later in the privacy of presidential introspection, emerging from a melange of conversations, formal and informal, held with a variety of officials, members of Congress and private friends and advisers of long standing.

Yet it is The Tuesday Lunch group that creates what order there is in the production of decisions that direct the war. It forms the apex of the process.

At the luncheon, the President sits in a high-backed swivel chair at the south end of the room. Commander-in-Chief by law and in fact, he has the last and controlling word.

At the President's right is Rusk, impassive in the eye of the hurricane; clear-headed to his supporters in his single-minded approach to the war, but simple-minded to his critics. At the President's left is McNamara, a complex man disquieted by a war that cannot be molded into a logical pattern of projectable input, ascertainable cost and discernible result.

At the foot of the table is Rostow, a man of rapidly increased influence, leading advocate of the strategy of vigorously intensifying the war, now eagerly, yet tensely, approaching the time of testing that will prove him right or wrong.

Next to McNamara is Christian, there to keep abreast of foreign affairs so that he makes no misstep in what he

says to the press and to offer advice on probable public and press reaction to the options under discussion.

Opposite Christian is usually an empty chair, occupied on occasion by Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Rarely is it filled by Vice President Humphrey. Once in a long while, other invited guests may also draw up a chair. Sometimes, if Rusk or McNamara are out of town, their deputies, Nicholas deB. Katzenbach and Cyrus R. Vance, sit in for them.

Reminiscent of Senate

THE LUNCHEONS became a fixture of the Johnson Administration starting about February, 1964, when McGeorge Bundy sat in the seat Rostow now occupies. It was Mr. Johnson's idea to set up a system of regular meetings on foreign policy questions. The setting provides the President with some of the same sense of relaxed intimacy through physical proximity to his top lieutenants that he had on Capitol Hill as Senate Majority Leader.

The three organizations represented at The Tuesday Lunch prepare for it each in its own way. Rostow, at the White House, is the boss of the agenda. On Mondays, he telephones the offices of Rusk and McNamara, asking what they want discussed.

Many of the items are worked out by Rostow with Rusk's departmental executive secretary, Benjamin H. Read. The President sometimes has suggestions. So does Rostow. Rusk draws topics from the State Department and from his own judgment.

Decisions Are on the Menu

At the Pentagon on Mondays, McNamara, Deputy Secretary Vance and Gen. Wheeler usually have lunch at 12:30. Then at 2 p.m., the three meet with the other military chiefs in the Chiefs' war room and for an hour or more go over the strategy, the target lists, the mundane and sophisticated problems of the war in Vietnam, to isolate the overriding issues that require presidential consideration.

By Tuesday, the President has received papers on all the agenda items (he is a massive bedtime reader), but if something new is added at the last minute, Rostow sees that he is forewarned with a new paper or even a voluminous tab-indexed file.

While Vietnam usually dominates the Tuesday Lunch, there almost always are several other topics. They recently have ranged, for example, from the nuclear nonproliferation treaty and the antiballistic missile problem to the use abroad of Public Law 480 on surplus food and the Indian-Pakistan military supply dilemma.

Vietnam items may be as specific as a target list, Saigon port congestion, inflationary pressures or the state of diplomatic probing.

A Matter of Protocol

ON TUESDAYS, McNamara usually stops off on his way from the Pentagon to the White House to exchange views with Rusk at the State Department. On occasion, Rusk has gone to the Pentagon for this purpose. But for geographic and protocol reasons—Rusk is the senior Cabinet official—it is usually the other way around.

As described by the participants, the talk is unhurried; the approach, leisurely; the examination of the facts, meticulous, with the pros and cons fully debated and the final word of decision, of course, the President's.

There is no stenographer, no tape recorder present. Jotted longhand notations of the President's orders and decisions are taken by Rusk, McNamara and Rostow. But there is no record for history of who took which position on what issue, the degree of differences or the vigor or absence of it in debating them. None admits writing any memorandum to record that.

On occasion, Mrs. Johnson may drop in on the luncheon to say hello, or Lynda Bird may come by for a quick word with her father. Sometimes during the luncheon, maps and charts are employed, but these are handled by the principals.

The meetings continue over coffee until 2:30 or 3 or even 3:30, depending on the agenda and on other presidential appointments. Afterward, Rusk and McNamara usually leave the White House together, sometimes for another talk at State. Rostow returns to his office in the basement of the West Wing and calls in Bromley Smith, executive secretary of the National Security Council, whose office adjoins Rostow's.

Rostow gets Read at State on the phone, and with Smith taking notes, Rostow tells them both the essential presidential decisions. Rostow takes more notes at the luncheon table than anyone else, notes intertwined with doodles.

Rusk, at State, calls in Read to pass

on, verbally, that portion of his own views that he wants to disseminate in State on a need-to-know basis. Information is parceled out to key officials, who include, in addition to Katzenbach, such men as Assistant Secretary William P. Bundy, whose area is the Far East; Leonard Unger, a Bundy deputy, whose time is almost wholly devoted to Vietnam; W. Averell Harriman, who is in charge of peace probes, and United Nations Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg, who is often notified through Assistant Secretary Joseph Sisco.

McNamara, who does not operate as Rusk does through an executive assistant, passes on White House decisions to appropriate officials in Defense on a person-to-person basis. Chief among them are Vance, Gen. Wheeler, Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs John T. McNaughton and the three civilian service secretaries.

Pro Forma 'Ratification'

SOME MAJOR DECISIONS taken at the luncheon sometimes are "ratified" by the larger and more cumbersome National Security Council, where an official National Security Action Memorandum (NASAM) may be formalized for the records.

The National Security Council has long been supplanted as the chief forum for major policy decisions. The NSC was a favorite of President Eisenhower, but President Kennedy, much more of an improviser and prone to ad hoc meetings which cut across bureaucratic lines of authority, let it wither. Mr. Johnson similarly found the NSC

See LUNCH, Page C2, Column 1